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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the increased emphasis placed on multicultural diversity in the School Psychology Program at Indiana State University. Two assumptions were made about the prominent role diversity is assuming at the university. First, the program is one of several subsystems that is emphasizing diversity in the university community. Thus, this assumption is one of timing and is identified as subsystem concurrence. The second assumption is that change agents must assert themselves to initiate an increased emphasis on diversity, and this responsibility rests with faculty, staff, and students in the program. Neither subsystem concurrence nor the presence of change agents has been a sufficient condition alone to promote meaningful programmatic change. Rather, both have been necessary conditions to enhance diversity in the program. The faculty and staff were surveyed for their opinions on program improvements. Suggestions include: (1) remind program organizers that building a program requires dialogue; (2) attempt to practice diversity and inclusiveness in every venue of the university community; and (3) valuing diversity and modeling inclusiveness must originate with the faculty, staff, and students working together as change agents. (Author/JDM)

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Faculty Perspectives on Building a Diverse, Inclusive School Psychology Program

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Faculty Perspectives on Building a Diverse, Inclusive School Psychology Program

Abstract

This paper examines the increased emphasis that multicultural diversity has assumed in the School Psychology Program at Indiana State University. Two important assumptions form the premise for the prominent role diversity is assuming. First, the Program is one of several subsystems that is emphasizing diversity in the University community. This emphasis is demonstrated, in part, by the provision of resources to support initiatives throughout the various subsystems. Thus, the first key assumption is one of timing and is identified as subsystem concurrence. The second key assumption is that change agents must assert themselves to initiate an increased emphasis on diversity, and this responsibility rests with faculty, staff, and students in the program. Neither subsystem concurrence nor the presence of change agents has been a sufficient condition alone to promote meaningful programmatic change. Rather, both have been necessary, though insufficient, conditions to enhance diversity in the Program. In addition to discussing these issues, the paper provides faculty perspectives on current programmatic strengths and weaknesses related to diversity, and it provides recommendations from faculty for programs desiring to enhance their diversity and inclusiveness.

Faculty Perspectives on Building a Diverse, Inclusive School Psychology Program

Over the past two years, the School Psychology Program at Indiana State University has worked extensively on program revisions. A significant part of these revisions has included the emergence of multicultural diversity as a major programmatic theme. Obvious curricular revisions are occurring in the program. These include infusing content on multiculturalism across multiple places in the curriculum, adding a specific course on cultural diversity, and offering students greater exposure to diverse populations via field assignments. Clearly, these are positive developments. However, programs optimally focusing on cultural diversity are those based in learning communities which strive to be diverse and inclusive.

The premise for successful programmatic changes pertaining to diversity in the School Psychology Program rests on the combination of two key elements. First, the Program is part of several subsystems that, concurrently, are uniquely emphasizing diversity. Second, the primary reason this Program is elevating the importance of diversity is due to faculty, staff, and student initiative. Both of these elements–subsystem concurrence and faculty/staff/student initiative–are necessary, though insufficient conditions for promoting promising change; thus, by themselves, they are limited. Together, however, they are a powerful combination that has the ability to create meaningful and enduring change in sustaining a diverse and inclusive School Psychology Program. Each of these is discussed in more detail.

Subsystem Concurrence on Diversity Initiatives

The School Psychology Program is itself a dynamic system. Similar to other professional programs, the Program has a reputable faculty, an espoused philosophy, a defined curriculum, an outstanding group of students, and multiple accreditations (APA, NASP, and the

State of Indiana). This system, however, does not function in isolation, and it is more clearly understood relative to other systems within the University community. The Program is based in the Department of Educational and School Psychology. Three of 11 full-time faculty are trained as school psychologists. These 3 faculty, along with 5 other department faculty (with interests related to school psychology) and 2 student representatives, form the School Psychology Committee, which is responsible for the governance of the Program. Thus, the Program has broad representation within the department. The department, though, is based in yet another subsystem, the School of Education, which constitutes one of the largest subsystems within the University system.

Diversity initiatives are currently underway at each of these systemic levels–program, department, school, and university. Because they are supported by resources (i.e., personnel, fiscal allocations, faculty/administrative endorsement, planned activities), the initiatives possess legitimate potential to influence various subsystems. The relationship of these subsystems and resources are depicted in Figure 1. Additionally, brief descriptions of resources for each subsystem are listed in Table 1. See Smith (2000) for a detailed discussion of these resources.

Borrowing from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, the Program as a subsystem can be viewed relative to other subsystems, each of which is nested within a larger one. Faculty and students will have the most direct interaction with one another in the Program subsystem, and over time, Program resources (see Table 1) will have the most influence on faculty and students and their work on promoting diversity. However, faculty and student interactions are inevitably influenced by forces in a concentric subsystem, namely, the department. A typical example is that some students engage in research with an educational psychology faculty member whose research agenda focuses on an aspect of multicultural diversity. Consequently, students acquire knowledge and skills that intertwine positively with

their preparation as school psychologists, although they are not working with a school psychology trainer. This pattern of influence is repeated in other concentric subsystems in which faculty and students reside (see Figure 1). Although the potential for multiple sources of influence on promoting diversity exists, the subsystems and their rich resources will not produce meaningful change without the investment of change agents.

Faculty, Staff, and Students as Change Agents

In preparation for this presentation, the author developed a brief survey (see Smith, 2000) and solicited input from faculty and staff in the Department of Educational and School Psychology. Why has diversity emerged as a major theme in revisions to the Program? Responses from faculty and staff identified several reasons including society's heightened awareness of diversity, the lack of applicability of human service models based predominantly on Caucasian, middle class populations, the unique needs of children from diverse cultural backgrounds, and the presence of a significant number of faculty members with professional interest in diversity.

If diversity is a priority, what is the Program currently doing well? Diversity issues are being integrated into curricular areas that, heretofore, did not address such content or did so to a limited extent. In addition, the Program is placing practicum students more strategically in settings with diverse groups, and the Porter School Psychology Center, a university clinic, regularly staffs cases on clients/referrals with unique cultural characteristics. In terms of inclusiveness, students participate actively in the Program. They have representation on the School Psychology Committee, and they make excellent suggestions at Program retreats. Yet another strength is that the majority of faculty have diversity as a part of their research agenda, and several students are planning dissertation research around topics on diversity. Finally, the faculty is diverse in terms of race and gender, and the presence of a diverse group of faculty

bespeaks the importance of diversity in general.

What does the Program need to do better? Although the Program has made gains in infusing diversity into the curriculum, more could be accomplished with the long-term goal of having diversity represented extensively in every programmatic experience (courses, practicum, internship, dissertation). The Program must identify explicit goals toward which students will work in acquiring knowledge and building understanding of diversity. Also, the Program must continue to accept a broad definition of diversity that moves beyond a traditional emphasis on race and ethnicity and promotes a more inclusive mind set. Lastly, the Program must be sure to have support systems for our graduate students who are from underrepresented groups. Their comfort level and success in our community are a litmus test for achieving a truly diverse, inclusive Program.

Finally, what might we share with other school psychology programs about building a program that values and emphasizes diversity and inclusiveness? Responses from faculty and staff were clear on three points. First, remind programs that this requires dialogue. Constructive dialogue takes time and requires patience and understanding. Second, endeavor to practice diversity and inclusiveness in every venue of the University community and beyond. Third, and most important, valuing diversity and modeling inclusiveness must originate with the faculty, staff, and students working together. Herein lies the second key element to our potential success in the Indiana State University School Psychology Program. The Program, department, school, and University subsystems have exceptional resources to offer in building a diverse, inclusive Program, but they are unable to produce such an outcome without the commitment of faculty, staff, and students to work together as change agents.

References

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Table 1

Available Resources for Enhancing Multicultural Diversity in Various University Subsystems

Subsystem/Resource	
School Psychology Program	
History:	The Program has a long history of emphasizing diversity, perhaps most notably through the work of Dr. Liam Grimley with International School Psychology
Faculty Research:	The 3 faculty members trained as school psychologists all have diversity as part of their research agendas. Research focuses on disabilities, gender, race, and sexual orientation.
Student Interests:	Several students in the Program pursue research on topics such as deafness, blindness, cultural competence, and identity development.
Recruitment Initiatives:	The program assistant sends program information via US Mail to hundreds of minority students who are seniors with psychology or education majors. Program faculty make personal contacts as well.
Curriculum Revisions:	Diversity is increasingly emphasized via infusion in several courses and the requirement of a multicultural psychology course.
Field Placements/ Clinic Cases:	Students participate in practica that emphasize service to diverse groups along dimensions such as race, SES, and rural/urban status. In addition, student rotate through the Porter School Psychology Center, and cases that involve culturally-diverse clients are staffed for the benefit of all practicum students.
SASP:	The Student Affiliates in School Psychology group promotes awareness and sponsors activities focusing on multicultural diversity.
Department of Educational & School Psychology	
Adams Visiting Scholar Program:	The department may access funds from the School of Education to bring visiting scholars to campus. Although not intended for diversity initiatives per se, the department has used Adams' funds for 3 consecutive years to bring scholars with expertise in multicultural diversity to the University.
Faculty Recruitment Initiatives:	In the recent past, the department has hired 4 new faculty members, each of whom has diversity as part of their teaching or research agenda. Two of these faculty members, both individuals from minority groups, were hired as part of a search for one position. The department successfully advocated to hire both when they rose to the top of the candidate list.
Faculty Research:	Nine of 11 department faculty have research agendas that focus on diversity issues or underrepresented groups. Research agendas vary considerably and include topics such as remedial strategies for reading disabilities, treatment of children/adolescents with ADHD, stress and coping strategies with HIV-infected women and children, maternal leave policies in higher education, literacy and parenting with racial minorities, culturally-based language development of low-SES minority children, identity development and intercultural competence, and sexual orientation in school psychology training.

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Department of Educational & School Psychology	
Student/ Faculty Diversity Discussions:	The department recently began a series of student/faculty discussions focusing on various topics pertaining to diversity. These are informal discussions at a faculty member's home, and the goal is to promote awareness of a topic in a relaxed, casual atmosphere.
School of Education (SOE)	
History:	The SOE has promoted diversity in several ways. Notably, the Professional Development School Partnership has provided teacher candidates access to diverse student groups in public schools. Also, the SOE recently published a monograph focusing on diversity initiatives.
Diversity Plan:	The SOE is the only school/college in the University with a written plan designed to enhance multicultural diversity in programs and personnel (faculty, staff, and students).
Diversity Task Force:	Last year, the interim dean commissioned a task force to revise and update the Diversity Plan and to make recommendations that would take the SOE to a new and challenging level in work on diversity.
NCATE Accreditation:	The SOE's recent NCATE accreditation challenged the SOE to expand training experiences with diverse populations for teacher educators. The SOE is using the accreditation suggestions as a way to enhance diversity.
Adams Visiting Scholar Program:	This program, noted about in Level 2, occasionally results in other departments sponsoring scholars whose expertise or experience involves diverse populations.
Indiana State University	
Strategic Planning:	The University has a strategic plan that contains 9 goals, one of which avows that the institution shall work to enhance the diversity of its student population, promote recruitment practices that attract qualified minorities for faculty and staff positions, and implement programs and curricula that affirm the value of underrepresented groups.
Visiting Minority Scholars:	The Office of Academic Affairs funds this program that enables programs/departments to sponsor visiting scholars who are from underrepresented groups. It is different from the Adams Program in that it is designed specifically for minority scholars.
Faculty Diversity Teams:	This team is composed of faculty throughout the University who are studying the feasibility of developing cultural competencies that every student would possess as a graduate of Indiana State University.
School of Graduate Studies:	The School of Graduate Studies has been a strong proponent of cultural diversity. As such, the school has developed many creative strategies such as alternative uses of assistantship funds and promotion of student research on diversity issues.
Salary Studies:	Central administration at the University has conducted a series of studies on faculty salaries by race and gender. Over the years, salary adjustments have been made accordingly. This proactive stance makes an important statement about racial and gender equity at the institution.

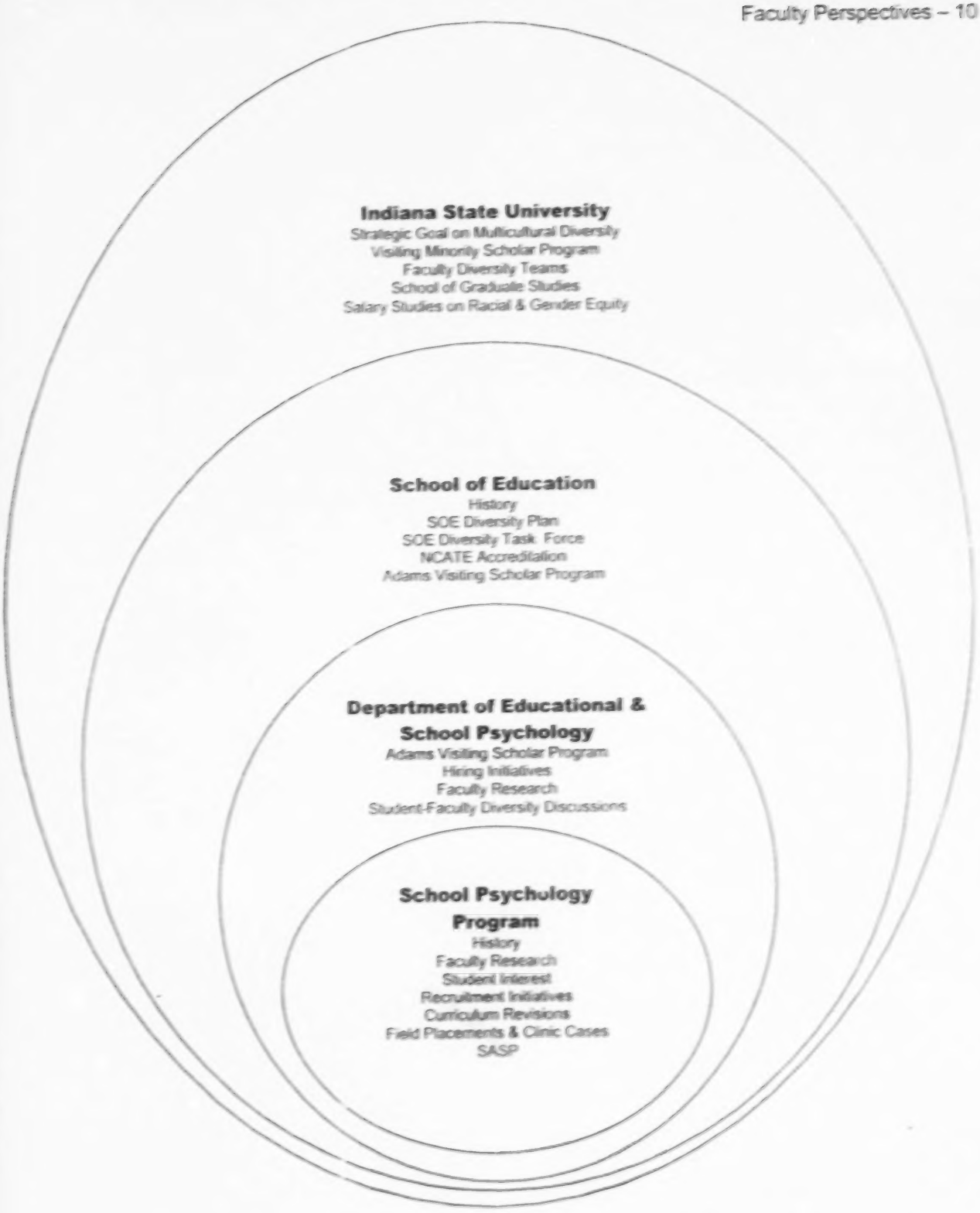

Figure 1: Subsystem Concurrence: Resources for Promoting Diversity Initiatives